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ABSTRACT

A study examined appropriate outcomes for students entering the work force after graduation from high school and for students going on to a community college for advanced training. Fifty-eight staff members of the Department fo Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education (DAVTE) of the Illinois State Board of Education were asked to write a profile for a student who had just graduated from high school. Half (29) of the staff were asked to discuss the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students should have in order to get a job. The other half of the staff were asked to discuss the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students should have in order to go on for further training. Using a content analysis approach, the researchers identified 11 major skill areas that were mentioned in the profiles. These included basic, computer, communication, entry-level job, interpersonal, job search, and occupational survival skills as well as knowledge of the world of work, positive attitudes toward learning and work, and possession of a tentative career plan. Because the majority of outcomes identified by the DAVTE staff were the same for both groups of students, differing primarily in the priority of the individual outcomes, it was concluded that the same high school program would be appropriate for both types of students providing it were designed so that students would obtain all the outcomes identified. (MN)

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State Staff Perceptions of Vocational Education Outcomes

Identification and Assessment of Vocational Educational Outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

During the past few years there has been increased attention to the quality, standards, and outcomes of the educational system in the United States. Reports such as the President's Commission on Excellence and the Twentieth Century Fund report on education suggest that the status quo is inadequate to meet current and future challenges. Educators in Illinois, like many other states, are re-examining the policies and processes of the educational system in order to strengthen and improve the quality of education.

In Illinois, this process has involved the identification of appropriate student outcomes of schooling. The Illinois State Board of Education has defined statements of outcomes as broad expressions of what students must know and be able to do as a result of schooling. While not defining any particular approach to instruction nor specifying any particular manner of organizing instructional programs, outcomes provide an observable and measurable academic, knowledge, or skill basis for the expectations of schooling. They provide a listing of the key manifestations of learning in particular learning areas. Without adequate attainment of a particular outcome statement, it is assumed that the individual's future opportunities will be somewhat diminished. Outcomes are being identified for all academic areas at the secondary level.

The need to identify appropriate outcomes for students in vocational education programs has also been recognized. Although Illinois has had

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successful vocational programs for over 80 years, there is a need to upgrade these programs to meet the demanding challenges of today and the decades ahead. These challenges include the continuing and rapid technological change in the workplace, the increasing change in the characteristics of the work force, and the need to support the economic stability of individual citizens and the state. Outcomes which have been identified or used in the past may no longer be appropriate or feasible in face of new challenges. Outcomes must be identified which meet not only present needs but are adaptable to future directions.

The High School and Beyond data from Illinois senior class of 1980 show that more than 32 percent planned to enter the work force immediately after graduation. Another 10 percent of the graduates planned to pursue military, homemaking, and proprietary school training options after graduation. Most of the others planned to pursue further education at the post-secondary level. Clearly, a large group of students require preparation for work during their high school years, while a similarly large group intend to specialize later.

This study provides an initial attempt to identify appropriate outcomes for students entering the work force and for students going on for advanced study. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of state staff regarding individual outcomes of students as a result of completing a high school program. Outcomes were defined as what the student should know and be able to do, and include skills, knowledge and attitudes. Two key questions provided the focus for this study:

1. What should high school graduates who are looking for a job, know and be able to do as a result of completing a high school program?

2. What should high school graduates who are going on for further education and training, know and be able to do as a result of completing a high school program?

METHOD

Procedure

During a department meeting, 58 staff members of the Department of Adult, Vocational and Technical Education (DAVTE), Illinois State Board of Education, were asked to write a profile for a student who had just graduated from high school. Half (29) of the staff were asked to respond to the following question:

1. It's the day after the student has graduated and wants to get a job. What skills, knowledge, and attitudes should the student have in order to get the job? Ask yourself "what should the student know and be able to do" as a result of completing the program?

The other half of the staff (29) were asked to respond to the following question:

2. It's the day after the student has graduated and wants to go on to a community college for advanced training. What skills, knowledge, and attitudes should the student have in order to go on for further training? Ask yourself, "what should the student know and be able to do" as a result of completing the high school program?

Analysis

The profiles were analyzed using a content analysis approach. This involved the following procedures:

1. Profiles were read to gain an overall perspective and to identify outcomes which were frequently mentioned.

2. Categories of outcomes were developed based upon the outcomes described in the profiles.

3. The descriptions of outcomes in each profile were coded according to the categories.

4. A frequency count was made of the number of staff who identified each outcome.

5. Outcomes were prioritized, based upon frequency.

6. Two independent judges read the profiles and verified the appropriateness of categories, frequency counts, and prioritization.

FINDINGS

The findings of this substudy are presented in three sections:

A. Major categories of outcomes.
B. Quantitative results.
C. Composite profiles.

A. Major Categories of Outcomes:

The following are descriptions of the major categories of outcomes derived from the profiles:

Basic skills	- A foundation in the subjects of English, math, science, and social studies, evidenced by ability to read, write, compute, and use computer.
Computer skills	- The ability to function as a good consumer, i.e., the ability to handle money, use transportation systems, and make decisions.
Communication skills	- Ability to communicate effectively with others, verbally and in writing.
Entry level job skills	- Technical skills which enable a person to obtain an entry level position in the labor market.
Interpersonal skills	- Ability to get along with others.
Job search skills	- Knowledge of how to look for a job and ability to fill out applications, write a resume and interview effectively.
Knowledge of world of work	- Awareness of occupational clusters, jobs within clusters and job requirements.
Occupational survival skills	- Work skills that are transferable to all jobs and help individuals to maintain employment, i.e., the ability to be on

time, follow directions, present a good image and analyze and solve problems.

Positive attitude toward learning - Willingness and interest to continue learning, either in a formal or nonformal setting.

Positive attitude toward work - Feeling positive toward work, i.e., an appreciation for work, willingness to work hard, and awareness of the need to be honest and loyal.

Tentative career plan - Knowledge of one's career choices based on interest, abilities and economic and other conditions.

B. Quantitative Results:

The following section presents results of the content analysis of profiles written by the DAVTE staff. Outcomes identified by the staff are rank ordered by frequency of appearance within the profiles. Based upon the evidence, judgment statements were formulated and are presented in the form of conclusions.

Key Question 1. What should high school graduates who are looking for a job know and be able to do as a result of completing a high school program?

Conclusions	Evidence		
	Outcomes identified by DAVTE staff (N=29)		
	Frequency (number of staff identifying outcome)	Percent (of staff identifying outcome)	Outcome Category
1. The most important outcomes for a high school graduate looking for a job include basic skills, occupational survival skills, a positive attitude toward work, job search skills and entry level job skills	22	75.86	Basic skills
	21	72.41	Occupational Survival skills
	19	65.52	Positive attitude toward work
	15	51.72	Job search skills
	14	48.28	Entry level job skills
2. Somewhat important outcomes for a high school graduate looking for a job include communication skills, knowledge of the world of work, a positive attitude toward learning and interpersonal skills.	10	34.48	Communication skills
	9	31.03	Knowledge of world of work
	8	27.59	Positive attitude toward learning
	6	20.69	Interpersonal skills
3. Less important outcomes for a high school graduate who is looking for a job include self-confidence, consumer skills, entrepreneurial skills, identified career direction, awareness of current labor market and work experience.	5 (or less)	17.24 (or less)	Self-confidence
			Consumer skills
			Entrepreneurial skills
			Tentative career plan
			Awareness of current labor market conditions
			Work experience

Key Question 2. What should high school graduates who are going on for advanced training, know and be able to do as a result of completing a high school program?

Conclusions	Evidence		
	Outcomes identified by DAVTE staff (N=29)		
	Frequency (number of staff identifying outcome)	Percent (of staff identifying outcome)	Outcome Category
1. The most important outcomes for a student who is going on for advanced training include basic skills, communication skills, knowledge of the world of work, and entry level job skills	25	86.21	Basic skills
	14	48.28	Communication skills
	14	48.28	Knowledge of world of work
	14	48.28	Entry level job skills
	13	44.83	Positive attitude toward learning
2. Somewhat important outcomes for a student who is going on for advanced training include a positive attitude toward learning and work, an identified career direction, and occupational survival skills.	13	44.83	Tentative career plan
	10	34.48	Occupational survival skills
	8	27.59	Positive work attitude
	5 (or less)	17.24 (or less)	Study skills
			Interpersonal skills
			Self-confidence
3. Less important outcomes for a student who is going on for advanced training include study skills, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, entrepreneurial skills, awareness of current labor market and work experience.			Entrepreneurial skills
			Awareness of current labor market conditions
			Work experience

Key Questions 1 and 2. Comparison of outcomes identified by DAVTE staff for a high school graduate who is going on for further training and a high school graduate who is getting a job.

Conclusions	Evidence		
	Advanced Training	Obtaining a Job	
	Percent (Rank Order) (of staff identifying outcome)	Percent (Rank Order)	Outcome Category
1. Communication skills and knowledge of world of work are more important outcomes for a student who is going on for advanced training than for a student who is getting a job.	86.21(1)	75.86(1)	Basic skills
	48.28(2)	34.48(6)	Communication skills
	48.28(2)	31.03(7)	Knowledge of world of work
	48.28(2)	48.28(5)	Entry level job skills
	44.83(5)	27.59(8)	Positive attitude toward learning
2. Occupational survival skills and a positive attitude toward work are more important outcomes for a student who is getting a job than for a student who is going on for advanced training.	44.83(5)	17.24(10)	Tentative career plan
	34.48(7)	72.41(2)	Occupational survival skills
	27.59(8)	65.52(3)	Postive attitude toward work
	17.24(9)	0	Study Skills
3. Job search skills are an important outcome for a student who is getting a job, although appear not to be necessary for a student who is going on for advanced training.	17.24(9)	20.69(9)	Interpersonal skills
	17.24(9)	17.24(10)	Self-confidence
	17.24(9)	17.24(10)	Entrepreneurial skills
	17.24(9)	17.24(10	Awareness of current labor market
	17.24(9)	17.24(10)	Work experience
	0	17.24(10)	Consumer skills
	0	51.72(4)	Job search skills

C. Composite Profiles

The following section presents profiles of two students who have just graduated from high school--one who plans to look for a job and the other who plans to enroll in a community college for advanced training. Each profile describes what the student should know and be able to do as a result of the high school program.

Outcomes described in the following profiles were identified and prioritized from individual profiles written by staff of the Department of Adult, Vocational and Technical Education. The composite profiles have been prepared to indicate a prioritized grouping of student outcomes. The first paragraph in each composite paper represents the highest priority of grouped items and the last paragraph represents the lowest priority of grouped items.

PROFILE OF PAT

Pat has just graduated from high school and plans to look for a job . . .

Pat's background in general education includes knowledge in the subject areas of math, English, science and social studies. Partial evidence of this knowledge is represented by Pat's ability to compute, read, write, and use a computer. In addition to these basic skills, Pat has acquired knowledge, skills and positive attitudes related to the world of work. These include occupational survival skills such as the ability to follow directions, be on time, be well groomed and solve problems. Pat's attitude toward work is positive having an appreciation for work and a willingness to be productive and honest within the work setting. In addition, Pat knows how to conduct an effective job search and is adept in preparing a resume, filling out applications and interviewing. Technical

skills obtained in the high school program should qualify Pat to obtain employment in an entry-level position.

Pat is skilled in communicating--both verbally and in writing. Pat also understands the importance of effective interpersonal skills and in continuing to develop the ability to get along with and work with a wide variety of people. Pat's knowledge of the world of work has provided an awareness of the different occupational clusters and job requirements within the occupations. Along with this knowledge, Pat has a positive attitude toward lifelong learning.

Pat is aware of the current labor market conditions and has identified a personal career direction. The work experience during high school has helped prepare Pat for employment in the desired career. Other skills that Pat has acquired include entreprenurial and consumer skills. Throughout high school Pat has developed self-confidence and now feels willing and ready to take on the responsibility of a job.

PROFILE OF CHRIS

Chris has just graduated from high school and plans to enroll in a community college for advanced training . . .

Chris has a good background in general education which includes knowledge in the subject areas of math, English, science, and social studies. Partial evidence of this knowledge is Chris' ability to compute, read, write and use a computer. Chris is also skilled at communicating--both verbally and in writing. In addition to these basic skills, Chris has acquired knowledge about the world of work. This has provided Chris with an awareness of different occupational clusters and job requirements within occupations. Chris has developed skills within one occupation which

provides the needed qualifications for an entry level position and a base for advanced training.

Based upon knowledge of the work world and personal interests and abilities, Chris has identified a career direction. Chris has a positive attitude toward school and learning in order to prepare for a career and as a means to continually upgrading oneself. Chris also has a positive attitude toward the value of work and a willingness to be productive and honest within the work setting. To prepare for working in any occupation, Chris has obtained the necessary occupational survival skills, such as the ability to follow directions, to be on time, to be well-groomed, and particularly to solve problems.

As part of a commitment to continue school, Chris has developed good study skills. Chris also understands the importance of effective interpersonal skills and is continuing to develop the ability to get along with and work with a wide variety of people. Chris' self-confidence, entrepreneurial skills, and previous work experience will all help make Chris a successful student and worker.

DISCUSSION

The profiles of the two students--one who is going to a community college for advanced training and one who is looking for a job--appear to be quite similar. The majority of outcomes identified by the DAVTE staff are the same for both students. The primary difference between the two profiles is in the priority of outcomes, as determined by the number of DAVTE staff who identified each outcome. This would indicate that the same high school program would be appropriate for both types of students, if it is designed so that students would obtain <u>all</u> the outcomes identified.

Yet, if all outcomes are not stressed, then the prioritized ranking of outcomes may become significant, as different outcomes may need to be emphasized for different populations.

Two key similarities exist between the two profiles. First, the acquisition of basic skills was viewed as the most important outcome, regardless of the future plans of the student. Second, approximately half of the DAVTE staff felt that both students should acquire entry level job skills. Therefore, these two outcomes appear in the highest prioritized group of outcomes for both students. Other outcomes within the high priority group differ for the two students. It appears that important outcomes for a student looking for a job are those relating to obtaining and maintaining a job, i.e., job search skills, survival skills and positive work attitude. For a student going on for further training, outcomes such as communication skills and a knowledge of the world of work are viewed as most important.

For the most part, the high priority outcomes not in common for the two students are then represented in a second category of outcomes identified as somewhat important. For example, survival skills and positive work attitude are included in this group for a student who is going on for further training. Likewise, communication skills and knowledge of world of work are included in this grouping for a student getting a job. An exception to this, is that job search skills were not identified as an outcome for students going on for further training. A positive attitude toward learning is viewed as somewhat important for both students.

With a few exceptions, the lowest priority group of outcomes are similar for both students. Outcomes such as self-confidence, entrepreneurial skills, and awareness of current labor market conditions are in

common. Interpersonal skills are rated higher for a student getting a job, while identifying a tentative career plan is rated higher for a student going on for further training. The student going on for training is also expected to have good study skills, while the student obtaining a job is expected to acquire consumer skills.

In general, the outcomes identified in this study are consistent with student outcomes identified in the literature. Yet, in some cases the priority of outcomes is inconsistent with literature findings. For example, interpersonal skills are generally rated quite high by employers, but was considered a low priority by DAVTE staff. The literature would also support outcomes such as knowledge of the world of work and communication skills as being a high priority for students obtaining a job, which was not true in this study. It is also likely that job search skills would be viewed as important for all students, not just those looking for an immediate job.